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The People's Edition

Rizpah and other Poems

The
Poetical Works
of
ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

Rizpah
and other Poems

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
RIZPAH - - - - -	7
THE NORTHERN COBBLER - - - - -	16
THE REVENGE: A BALLAD OF THE FLEET - - - - -	27
THE SISTERS - - - - -	36
THE VILLAGE WIFE; OR, THE ENTAIL - - - - -	49
IN THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - - - - -	60
DEDICATORY POEM TO THE PRINCESS ALICE - - - - -	67
THE DEFENCE OF LUCKNOW - - - - -	68
SIR JOHN OLDCASTLE, LORD COBHAM - - - - -	77
COLUMBUS - - - - -	86

RIZPAH

17—

I

WAILING, wailing, wailing, the wind over land and
sea—

And Willy's voice in the wind, 'O mother, come out
to me.'

Why should he call me to-night, when he knows that
I cannot go?

For the downs are as bright as day, and the full moon
stares at the snow.

II

We should be seen, my dear; they would spy us out
of the town.

The loud black nights for us, and the storm rushing
over the down,

When I cannot see my own hand, but am led by the
 creak of the chain,
And grovel and grope for my son till I find myself
 drenched with the rain.

III

Anything fallen again? nay—what was there left to
 fall?
I have taken them home, I have number'd the bones,
 I have hidden them all.
What am I saying? and what are *you*? do you come
 as a spy?
Falls? what falls? who knows? As the tree falls so
 must it lie.

IV

Who let her in? how long has she been? you—what
 have you heard?
Why did you sit so quiet? you never have spoken a
 word.
O—to pray with me—yes—a lady—none of their
 spies—
But the night has crept into my heart, and begun to
 darken my eyes.

V

Ah—you, that have lived so soft, what should *you*
know of the night,
The blast and the burning shame and the bitter frost
and the fright?
I have done it, while you were asleep—you were only
made for the day.
I have gather'd my baby together—and now you may
go your way.

VI

Nay—for it's kind of you, Madam, to sit by an old
dying wife.
But say nothing hard of my boy, I have only an hour
of life.
I kiss'd my boy in the prison, before he went out to
die.
'They dared me to do it,' he said, and he never has
told me a lie.
I whipt him for robbing an orchard once when he was
but a child—
'The farmer dared me to do it,' he said; he was
always so wild—

And idle—and couldn't be idle—my Willy—he never
could rest.
The King should have made him a soldier, he would
have been one of his best.

VII

But he lived with a lot of wild mates, and they never
would let him be good ;
They swore that he dare not rob the mail, and he
swore that he would ;
And he took no life, but he took one purse, and when
all was done
He flung it among his fellows—I'll none of it, said my
son.

VIII

I came into court to the Judge and the lawyers. I told
them my tale,
God's own truth—but they kill'd him, they kill'd him
for robbing the mail.
They hang'd him in chains for a show—we had always
borne a good name—
To be hang'd for a thief—and then put away—isn't
that enough shame ?

Dust to dust—low down—let us hide ! but they set
him so high
That all the ships of the world could stare at him,
passing by.
God 'ill pardon the hell-black raven and horrible fowls
of the air,
But not the black heart of the lawyer who kill'd him
and hang'd him there.

IX

And the jailer forced me away. I had bid him my last
goodbye ;
They had fasten'd the door of his cell. 'O mother !'
I heard him cry.
I couldn't get back tho' I tried, he had something
further to say,
And now I never shall know it. The jailer forced me
away.

X

Then since I couldn't but hear that cry of my boy that
was dead,
They seized me and shut me up : they fasten'd me
down on my bed.

'Mother, O mother!'—he call'd in the dark to me
year after year—
They beat me for that, they beat me—you know that
I couldn't but hear;
And then at the last they found I had grown so stupid
and still
They let me abroad again—but the creatures had
worked their will.

XI

Flesh of my flesh was gone, but bone of my bone was
left—
I stole them all from the lawyers—and you, will you
call it a theft?—
My baby, the bones that had suck'd me, the bones
that had laughed and had cried—
Theirs? O no! they are mine—not theirs—they had
moved in my side.

XII

Do you think I was scared by the bones? I kiss'd 'em,
I buried 'em all—
I can't dig deep, I am old—in the night by the church-
yard wall.

My Willy 'ill rise up whole when the trumpet of judgment 'ill sound,
But I charge you never to say that I laid him in holy ground.

XIII

They would scratch him up—they would hang him again on the cursed tree.

Sin? O yes—we are sinners, I know—let all that be,
And read me a Bible verse of the Lord's good will toward men—

'Full of compassion and mercy, the Lord'—let me hear it again;

'Full of compassion and mercy—long-suffering.' Yes,
O yes!

For the lawyer is born but to murder—the Saviour lives but to bless.

He'll never put on the black cap except for the worst of the worst,

And the first may be last—I have heard it in church—and the last may be first.

Suffering—O long-suffering—yes, as the Lord must know,

Year after year in the mist and the wind and the shower and the snow.

XIV

Heard, have you? what? they have told you he never
repented his sin.

How do they know it? are *they* his mother? are *you*
of his kin?

Heard! have you ever heard, when the storm on the
downs began,

The wind that 'ill wail like a child and the sea that 'ill
moan like a man?

XV

Election, Election and Reprobation—it's all very well.
But I go to-night to my boy, and I shall not find him
in Hell.

For I cared so much for my boy that the Lord has
look'd into my care,

And He means me I'm sure to be happy with Willy,
I know not where.

XVI

And if *he* be lost—but to save *my* soul, that is all your
desire:

Do you think that I care for *my* soul if my boy be
gone to the fire?

I have been with God in the dark—go, go, you may
leave me alone—
You never have borne a child—you are just as hard as
a stone.

XVII

Madam, I beg your pardon ! I think that you mean
to be kind,
But I cannot hear what you say for my Willy's voice
in the wind—
The snow and the sky so bright—he used but to call
in the dark,
And he calls to me now from the church and not from
the gibbet—for hark !
Nay—you can hear it yourself—it is coming—shaking
the walls—
Willy—the moon's in a cloud——Good-night. I am
going. He calls.

THE NORTHERN COBBLER

I

WAÄIT till our Sally cooms in, fur thou mun a' sights¹
to tell.

Eh, but I be maäin glad to seeä tha sa 'arty an' well.

'Cast awaäy on a disolut land wi' a vartical soon²!'

Strange fur to goä fur to think what saäilors a' seëan
an' a' doon ;

'Summat to drink—sa' 'ot?' I 'a nowt but Adam's
wine :

What's the 'eät o' this little 'ill-side to the 'eät o' the
line?

II

'What's i' tha bottle a-stanning theer?' I'll tell tha.
Gin.

But if thou wants thy grog, tha mun goä fur it down
to the inn.

¹ The vowels *ai*, pronounced separately though in the closest conjunction, best render the sound of the long *i* and *y* in this dialect. But since such words as *craäin*, *daäin*, *whai*, *ai* (I), etc., look awkward except in a page of express phonetics, I have thought it better to leave the simple *i* and *y*, and to trust that my readers will give them the broader pronunciation.

² The *oo* short, as in 'wood.'

Naay—fur I be maäin-glad, but thaw tha was iver sa
dry,
Thou gits naw gin fro' the bottle theer, an' I'll tell
tha why.

III

Meä an' thy sister was married, when wur it? back-end
o' June,
Ten year sin', and wa 'greed as well as a fiddle i'
tune:
I could fettle and clump owd booöts and shoes wi' the
best on 'em all,
As fer as fro' Thursby thurn hup to Harmsby and
Hutterby Hall.
We was busy as beeäs i' the bloom an' as 'appy as 'art
could think,
An' then the babby wur burn, and then I taäkes to the
drink.

IV

An' I weänt gaäinsaäy it, my lad, thaw I be hafe
shaämed on it now,
We could sing a good song at the Plow, we could sing
a good song at the Plow;

Thaw once of a frosty night I slither'd an' hurted my
huck,¹
An' I coom'd neck-an-crop soomtimes slaäpe down i'
the squad an' the muck :
An' once I fowt wi' the Taäilor—not hafe ov a man,
my lad—
Fur he scrawm'd an' scratted my faäce like a cat, an'
it maäde 'er sa mad
That Sally she turn'd a tongue-banger,² an' raäted ma,
'Sottin' thy braäins
Guzzlin' an' soäkin' an' smoäkin' an' hawmin'³ about
i' the laänes,
Soä sow-droonk that tha doesn not touch thy 'at to the
Squire ;'
An' I looök'd cock-eyed at my noäse an' I seeäd 'im
a-gittin' o' fire ;
But sin' I wur hallus i' liquor an' hallus as droonk as a
king,
Foäłks' coostom flitted awaäy like a kite wi' a brokken
string.

V

An' Sally she wesh'd foäłks' cloäths to keep the wolf
fro' the door,

¹ Hip.² Scold.³ Lounging.

Eh but the moor she riled me, she druv me to drink
the moor,
Fur I fun', when 'er back wur turn'd, wheer Sally's owd
stockin' wur 'id,
An' I grabb'd the munny she maäde, and I weär'd it
o' liquor, I did.

VI

An' one night I cooms 'oäm like a bull gotten loose at
a faäir,
An' she wur a-waäitin' fo'mma, an' cryin' and teärin' 'er
'aäir,
An' I tumbled athurt the craädle an' sweär'd as I'd
breäk ivry stick
O' furnitur 'ere i' the 'ouse, an' I gied our Sally a kick,
An' I mash'd the taäbles an' chairs, an' she an' the
babby beäl'd,¹
Fur I knaw'd naw moor what I did nor a mortal beäst
o' the feäld.

VII

An' when I waäked i' the murnin' I seeäd that our
Sally went laämed
Cos' o' the kick as I gied 'er, an' I wur dreädful
ashaämed ;

¹ Bellowed, cried out.

An' Sally wur sloomy¹ an' draggle taail'd in an owd
turn gown,
An' the babby's faäce wurn't wesh'd an' the 'ole 'ouse
hupside down.

VIII

An' then I minded our Sally sa pratty an' neät an'
sweeät,
Straät as a pole an' cleän as a flower fro' 'eäd to fecäät :
An' then I minded the fust kiss I gied 'er by Thursby
thurn;
Theer wur a lark a-singin' 'is best of a Sunday at
murn,
Couldn't see 'im, we 'eärd 'im a-mountin' oop 'igher an'
'igher,
An' then 'e turn'd to the sun, an' 'e shined like a sparkle
o' fire.
'Doesn't tha see 'im,' she axes, 'fur I can see 'im?' an' I
Seeäd nobbut the smile o' the sun as danced in 'er
pratty blue eye;
An' I says 'I mun gie tha a kiss,' an' Sally says 'Noä,
thou moänt,'
But I gied 'er a kiss, an' then anoother, an' Sally says
'doänt !'

¹ Sluggish, out of spirits.

IX

An' when we coom'd into Meeätin', at fust she wur all
in a tew,
But, arter, we sing'd the 'ymn together like birds on a
beugh ;
An' Muggins 'e preäch'd o' Hell-fire an' the loov o'
God fur men,
An' then upo' coomin' awaäy Sally gied me a kiss ov
'ersen.

X

Heer wur a fall fro' a kiss to a kick like Saätan as
fell
Down out o' heaven i' Hell-fire—thaw theer's naw
drinkin' i' Hell ;
Meä fur to kick our Sally as kep the wolf fro' the
door,
All along o' the drink, fur I loov'd 'er as well as afoor.

XI

Sa like a greät num-cumpus I blubber'd awaäy o' the
bed—
'Weänt niver do it naw moor ;' an' Sally looökt up an'
she said,

I'll upowd it¹ tha weänt; thou'rt like the rest o' the
men,
Thou'll goä sniffin' about the tap till tha does it agëan.
Theer's thy hennemy, man, an' I knaws, as knaws tha
sa well,
That, if tha seeäs 'im an' smells 'im tha'll foller 'im
slick into Hell.'

XII

'Naäy,' says I, 'fur I weänt goä sniffin' about the
tap.'
'Weänt tha?' she says, an' mysen I thowt i' mysen
'mayhap.'
'Noä:' an' I started awaäy like a shot, an' down to
the Hinn,
An' I browt what tha seeäs stannin' theer, yon big
black bottle o' gin.

XIII

'That caps owt,'² says Sally, an' saw she begins to
cry,
But I puts it inter 'er 'ands an' I says to 'er, 'Sally,'
says I,

¹ I'll uphold it.

² That's beyond everything.

'Stan' 'im theer i' the naäme o' the Lord an' the power
ov 'is Graäce,
Stan' 'im theer, fur I'll looök my hennemy straït i' the
faäce,
Stan' 'im theer i' the winder, an' let ma looök at 'im
then,
'E seeäms naw moor nor watter, an' 'e's the Divil's oän
sen.'

XIV

An' I wur down i' tha mouth, couldn't do naw work
an' all,
Nasty an' snaggy an' shaäky, an' poonch'd my 'and wi'
the hawl,
But she wur a power o' coomfut, an' sattled 'ersen o'
my knee,
An' coäxd an' coodled me oop till ageän I feel'd
mysen free.

XV

An' Sally she tell'd it about, an' foälk stood a-gawmin'¹
in,
As thaw it wur summat bewitch'd istead of a quart o'
gin;

¹ Staring vacantly.

An' some on 'em said it wur watter—an' I wur chousin'
the wife,
Fur I couldn't 'owd 'ands off gin, wur it nobbut to
saäve my life ;
An' blacksmith 'e strips me the thick ov 'is airm, 'an 'e
shaws it to me,
'Feäl thou this ! thou can't graw this upo' watter !'
says he.
An' Doctor 'e calls o' Sunday an' just as candles was
lit,
'Thou moänt do it,' he says, 'tha mun breäk 'im off
bit by bit.'
'Thou'rt but a Methody-man,' says Parson, and laäys
down 'is 'at,
An' 'e points to the bottle o' gin, 'but I respecks tha
fur that ;'
An' Squire, his oän very sen, walks down fro' the 'All
to see,
An' 'e spansk 'is 'and into mine, 'fur I respecks tha,'
says 'e ;
An' coostom ageän draw'd in like a wind fro' far an'
wide,
And browt me the booöts to be cobbled fro' hafe the
coountryside.

XVI

An' theer 'e stans an' theer 'e shall stan to my dying
daäy;
I 'a gotten to loov 'im ageän in anooother kind of a
waäy,
Proud on 'im, like, my lad, an' I keeäps 'im cleän an'
bright,
Loovs 'im, an' roobs 'im, an' doosts 'im, an' puts 'im
back i' the light.

XVII

Wouldn't a pint a' sarved as well as a quart? Naw
doubt:
But I liked a bigger feller to fight wi' an' fowt it
out.
Fine an' meller 'e mun be by this, if I cared to taäste,
But I moänt, my lad, and I weänt, fur I'd feäl mysen
cleän disgraäced.

XVIII

An' once I said to the Missis, ' My lass, when I cooms
to die,
Smash the bottle to smithers, the Divil's in 'im,'
said I.

But arter I chaänged my mind, an' if Sally be left
aloän,
I'll hev 'im a-buried wi'mma an' taäke 'im afoor the
Throän.

XIX

Coom thou 'eer—yon laädy a-steppin' along the
streeät,
Doesn't tha know 'er—sa pratty, an' feät, an' neät, an'
sweeät?
Look at the cloäths on 'er back, thebbe ammost spick-
span-new,
An' Tommy's faäce be as fresh as a codlin wesh'd i'
the dew.

XX

'Ere be our Sally an' Tommy, an' we be a-goin to
dine,
Baäcon an' taätes, an' a beslings-puddin'¹ an' Adam's
wine;
But if tha wants ony grog tha mun goä fur it down to
the Hinn,
Fur I weänt shed a drop on 'is blood, noä, not fur
Sally's oän kin.

¹ A pudding made with the first milk of the cow after calving.

THE REVENGE

A BALLAD OF THE FLEET

I

AT FLORES in the Azores Sir Richard Grenville lay,
And a pinnace, like a flutter'd bird, came flying from
far away :

'Spanish ships of war at sea ! we have sighted fifty-
three !'

Then swore Lord Thomas Howard : 'Fore God I am
no coward ;

But I cannot meet them here, for my ships are out of
gear,

And the half my men are sick. I must fly, but follow
quick.

We are six ships of the line ; can we fight with fifty-
three ?'

II

Then spake Sir Richard Grenville : 'I know you are
no coward ;

You fly them for a moment to fight with them again.

But I've ninety men and more that are lying sick
ashore.

I should count myself the coward if I left them, my
Lord Howard,
To these Inquisition dogs and the devildoms of Spain.'

III

So Lord Howard past away with five ships of war that
day,
Till he melted like a cloud in the silent summer
heaven ;
But Sir Richard bore in hand all his sick men from the
land
Very carefully and slow,
Men of Bideford in Devon,
And we laid them on the ballast down below ;
For we brought them all aboard,
And they blest him in their pain, that they were not
left to Spain,
To the thumbscrew and the stake, for the glory of the
Lord.

IV

He had only a hundred seamen to work the ship and
to fight,
And he sailed away from Flores till the Spaniard came
in sight,

With his huge sea-castles heaving upon the weather-bow.

‘Shall we fight or shall we fly?

Good Sir Richard, tell us now,

For to fight is but to die!

There’ll be little of us left by the time this sun be set.’

And Sir Richard said again: ‘We be all good English men.

Let us bang these dogs of Seville, the children of the devil,

For I never turn’d my back upon Don or devil yet.’

v

Sir Richard spoke and he laugh’d, and we roar’d a hurrah, and so

The little Revenge ran on sheer into the heart of the foe,

With her hundred fighters on deck, and her ninety sick below;

For half of their fleet to the right and half to the left were seen,

And the little Revenge ran on thro’ the long sea-lane between.

VI

Thousands of their soldiers look'd down from their
 decks and laugh'd,
Thousands of their seamen made mock at the mad
 little craft
Running on and on, till delay'd
By their mountain-like San Philip that, of fifteen
 hundred tons,
And up-shadowing high above us with her yawning
 tiers of guns,
Took the breath from our sails, and we stay'd.

VII

And while now the great San Philip hung above us
 like a cloud
Whence the thunderbolt will fall
Long and loud,
Four galleons drew away
From the Spanish fleet that day,
And two upon the larboard and two upon the starboard
 lay,
And the battle-thunder broke from them all.

VIII

But anon the great San Philip, she bethought herself
and went
Having that within her womb that had left her ill
content ;
And the rest they came aboard us, and they fought us
hand to hand,
For a dozen times they came with their pikes and
musqueteers,
And a dozen times we shook 'em off as a dog that
shakes his ears
When he leaps from the water to the land.

IX

And the sun went down, and the stars came out far
over the summer sea,
But never a moment ceased the fight of the one and
the fifty-three.
Ship after ship, the whole night long, their high-built
galleons came,
Ship after ship, the whole night long, with her battle-
thunder and flame ;
Ship after ship, the whole night long, drew back with
her dead and her shame.

For some were sunk and many were shatter'd, and so
could fight us no more—
God of battles, was ever a battle like this in the world
before ?

For he said 'Fight on ! fight on !'
Tho' his vessel was all but a wreck ;
And it chanced that, when half of the short summer
night was gone,
With a grisly wound to be drest he had left the deck,
But a bullet struck him that was dressing it suddenly
dead,
And himself he was wounded again in the side and the
head,
And he said 'Fight on ! fight on !'

XI

And the night went down, and the sun smiled out far
over the summer sea,
And the Spanish fleet with broken sides, lay round us
all in a ring ;
But they dared not touch us again, for they fear'd that
we still could sting,

So they watch'd what the end would be.
And we had not fought them in vain,
But in perilous plight were we,
Seeing forty of our poor hundred were slain,
And half of the rest of us maim'd for life
In the crash of the cannonades and the desperate
 strife ;
And the sick men down in the hold were most of them
 stark and cold,
And the pikes were all broken or bent, and the powder
 was all of it spent ;
And the masts and the rigging were lying over the
 side ;
But Sir Richard cried in his English pride,
'We have fought such a fight for a day and a
 night
As may never be fought again !
We have won great glory, my men !
And a day less or more
At sea or ashore,
We die—does it matter when ?
Sink me the ship, Master Gunner—sink her, split her
 in twain !
Fall into the hands of God, not into the hands of
Spain !'

XII

And the gunner said ‘Ay, ay,’ but the seamen made
reply :

‘We have children, we have wives,
And the Lord hath spared our lives.

We will make the Spaniard promise, if we yield, to let
us go ;

We shall live to fight again and to strike another blow.’
And the lion there lay dying, and they yielded to the
foe.

XIII

And the stately Spanish men to their flagship bore him
then,

Where they laid him by the mast, old Sir Richard
caught at last,

And they praised him to his face with their courtly
foreign grace ;

But he rose upon their decks, and he cried :

‘I have fought for Queen and Faith like a valiant man
and true ;

I have only done my duty as a man is bound to do :
With a joyful spirit I Sir Richard Grenville die !’
And he fell upon their decks, and he died.

XIV

And they stared at the dead that had been so valiant
and true,
And had holden the power and glory of Spain so
cheap
That he dared her with one little ship and his English
few ;
Was he devil or man? He was devil for aught they
knew,
But they sank his body with honour down into the
deep,
And they mann'd the Revenge with a swarthier alien
crew,
And away she sail'd with her loss and long'd for her
own ;
When a wind from the lands they had ruin'd awoke
from sleep,
And the water began to heave and the weather to
moan,
And or ever that evening ended a great gale blew,
And a wave like the wave that is raised by an earth-
quake grew,
Till it smote on their hulls and their sails and their
masts and their flags,

And the whole sea plunged and fell on the shot-
shatter'd navy of Spain,
And the little Revenge herself went down by the island
crag
To be lost evermore in the main.

THE SISTERS

THEY have left the doors ajar ; and by their clash,
And prelude on the keys, I know the song,
Their favourite—which I call ‘The Tables Turned.’
Evelyn begins it ‘O diviner Air.’

EVELYN

O diviner Air,
Thro' the heat, the drowth, the dust, the glare,
Far from out the west in shadowing showers,
Over all the meadow baked and bare,
Making fresh and fair
All the bowers and the flowers,
Fainting flowers, faded bowers,
Over all this weary world of ours,
Breathe, diviner Air !

A sweet voice that—you scarce could better that.
Now follows Edith echoing Evelyn.

EDITH

O diviner light,
Thro' the cloud that roofs our noon with night,
Thro' the blotting mist, the blinding showers,
Far from out a sky for ever bright,
Over all the woodland's flooded bowers,
Over all the meadow's drowning flowers,
Over all this ruin'd world of ours,
Break, diviner light !

Marvellously like, their voices—and themselves !
Tho' one is somewhat deeper than the other,
As one is somewhat graver than the other—
Edith than Evelyn. Your good Uncle, whom
You count the father of your fortune, longs
For this alliance : let me ask you then,
Which voice most takes you ? for I do not doubt
Being a watchful parent, you are taken
With one or other : tho' sometimes I fear
You may be flickering, fluttering in a doubt
Between the two—which must not be—which might

Be death to one : they both are beautiful :
Evelyn is gayer, wittier, prettier, says
The common voice, if one may trust it : she ?
No ! but the paler and the graver, Edith.
Woo her and gain her then : no wavering, boy !
The graver is perhaps the one for you
Who jest and laugh so easily and so well.
For love will go by contrast, as by likes.

No sisters ever prized each other more.
Not so : their mother and her sister loved
More passionately still.

But that my best
And oldest friend, your Uncle, wishes it,
And that I know you worthy everyway
To be my son, I might, perchance, be loath
To part them, or part from them : and yet one
Should marry, or all the broad lands in your view
From this bay window—which our house has held
Three hundred years—will pass collaterally.

My father with a child on either knee,
A hand upon the head of either child,
Smoothing their locks, as golden as his own
Were silver, 'get them wedded' would he say.

And once my prattling Edith ask'd him 'why?'
Ay, why? said he, 'for why should I go lame?'
Then told them of his wars, and of his wound.
For see—this wine—the grape from whence it flow'd
Was blackening on the slopes of Portugal,
When that brave soldier, down the terrible ridge
Plunged in the last fierce charge at Waterloo,
And caught the laming bullet. He left me this,
Which yet retains a memory of its youth,
As I of mine, and my first passion. Come!
Here's to your happy union with my child!

Yet must you change your name: no fault of mine!
You say that you can do it as willingly
As birds make ready for their bridal-time
By change of feather: for all that, my boy,
Some birds are sick and sullen when they moult.
An old and worthy name! but mine that stirr'd
Among our civil wars and earlier too
Among the Roses, the more venerable.
I care not for a name—no fault of mine.
Once more—a happier marriage than my own!

You see yon Lombard poplar on the plain.
The highway running by it leaves a breadth
Of sward to left and right, where, long ago,

One bright May morning in a world of song,
I lay at leisure, watching overhead
The ærial poplar wave, an amber spire.

I dozed ; I woke. An open landaulet
Whirl'd by, which, after it had past me, show'd
Turning my way, the loveliest face on earth.
The face of one there sitting opposite,
On whom I brought a strange unhappiness,
That time I did not see.

Love at first sight
May seem—with goodly rhyme and reason for it—
Possible—at first glimpse, and for a face
Gone in a moment—strange. Yet once, when first
I came on lake Llanberris in the dark,
A moonless night with storm—one lightning-fork
Flash'd out the lake ; and tho' I loiter'd there
The full day after, yet in retrospect
That less than momentary thunder-sketch
Of lake and mountain conquers all the day.

The Sun himself has limn'd the face for me.
Not quite so quickly, no, nor half as well.
For look you here—the shadows are too deep,
And like the critic's blurring comment make

The veriest beauties of the work appear
The darkest faults : the sweet eyes frown : the lips
Seem but a gash. My sole memorial
Of Edith—no, the other,—both indeed.

So that bright face was flash'd thro' sense and soul
And by the poplar vanish'd—to be found
Long after, as it seem'd, beneath the tall
Tree-bowers, and those long-sweeping beechen boughs
Of our New Forest. I was there alone :
The phantom of the whirling landaulet
For ever past me by : when one quick peal
Of laughter drew me thro' the glimmering glades
Down to the snowlike sparkle of a cloth
On fern and foxglove. Lo, the face again,
My Rosalind in this Arden—Edith—all
One bloom of youth, health, beauty, happiness,
And moved to merriment at a passing jest.

There one of those about her knowing me
Call'd me to join them ; so with these I spent
What seem'd my crowning hour, my day of days.

I woo'd her then, nor unsuccessfully,
The worse for her, for me ! was I content ?

Ay—no, not quite ; for now and then I thought
Laziness, vague love-longings, the bright May,
Had made a heated haze to magnify
The charm of Edith—that a man's ideal
Is high in Heaven, and lodged with Plato's God,
Not findable here—content, and not content,
In some such fashion as a man may be
That having had the portrait of his friend
Drawn by an artist, looks at it, and says,
' Good ! very like ! not altogether he.'

As yet I had not bound myself by words,
Only, believing I loved Edith, made
Edith love *me*. Then came the day when I,
Flattering myself that all my doubts were fools
Born of the fool this Age that doubts of all—
Not I that day of Edith's love or mine—
Had braced my purpose to declare myself:
I stood upon the stairs of Paradise.
The golden gates would open at a word.
I spoke it—told her of my passion, seen
And lost and found again, had got so far,
Had caught her hand, her eyelids fell—I heard
Wheels, and a noise of welcome at the doors—
On a sudden after two Italian years

Had set the blossom of her health again,
The younger sister, Evelyn, enter'd—there,
There was the face, and altogether she.
The mother fell about the daughter's neck,
The sisters closed in one another's arms,
Their people throng'd about them from the hall,
And in the thick of question and reply
I fled the house, driven by one angel face,
And all the Furies.

I was bound to her ;
I could not free myself in honour—bound
Not by the sounded letter of the word,
But counterpressures of the yielded hand
That timorously and faintly echoed mine,
Quick blushes, the sweet dwelling of her eyes
Upon me when she thought I did not see—
Were these not bonds? nay, nay, but could I wed her
Loving the other? do her that great wrong?
Had I not dream'd I loved her yesternorn?
Had I not known where Love, at first a fear,
Grew after marriage to full height and form?
Yet after marriage, that mock-sister there—
Brother-in-law—the fiery nearness of it—
Unlawful and disloyal brotherhood —

What end but darkness could ensue from this
For all the three ? So Love and Honour jarr'd
Tho' Love and Honour join'd to raise the full
High-tide of doubt that sway'd me up and down
Advancing nor retreating.

Edith wrote :

'My mother bids me ask' (I did not tell you—
A widow with less guile than many a child.
God help the wrinkled children that are Christ's
As well as the plump cheek—she wrought us harm,
Poor soul, not knowing) 'are you ill ?' (so ran
The letter) 'you have not been here of late.
You will not find me here. At last I go
On that long-promised visit to the North.
I told your wayside story to my mother
And Evelyn. She remembers you. Farewell.
Pray come and see my mother. Almost blind
With ever-growing cataract, yet she thinks
She sees you when she hears. Again farewell.'

Cold words from one I had hoped to warm so far
That I could stamp my image on her heart !
'Pray come and see my mother, and farewell.'
Cold, but as welcome as free airs of heaven
After a dungeon's closeness. Selfish, strange !

What dwarfs are men ! my strangled vanity
Utter'd a stifled cry—to have vext myself
And all in vain for her—cold heart or none—
No bride for me. Yet so my path was clear
To win the sister.

Whom I woo'd and won.

For Evelyn knew not of my former suit,
Because the simple mother work'd upon
By Edith pray'd me not to whisper of it.
And Edith would be bridesmaid on the day.

But on that day, not being all at ease,
I from the altar glancing back upon her,
Before the first ' I will ' was utter'd, saw
The bridesmaid 'pale, statuelike, passionless—
'No harm, no harm' I turn'd again, and placed
My ring upon the finger of my bride.

So, when we parted, Edith spoke no word,
She wept no tear, but round my Evelyn clung
In utter silence for so long, I thought
'What, will she never set her sister free?'

We left her, happy each in each, and then,
As tho' the happiness of each in each
Were not enough, must fain have torrents, lakes,
Hills, the great things of Nature and the fair,

To lift us as it were from commonplace,
And help us to our joy. Better have sent
Our Edith thro' the glories of the earth,
To change with her horizon, if true Love
Were not his own imperial all-in-all.

Far off we went. My God, I would not live
Save that I think this gross hard-seeming world
Is our misshaping vision of the Powers
Behind the world, that make our griefs our gains.

For on the dark night of our marriage-day
The great Tragedian, that had quench'd herself
In that assumption of the bridesmaid—she
That loved me—our true Edith—her brain broke
With over-acting, till she rose and fled
Beneath a pitiless rush of Autumn rain
To the deaf church—to be let in—to pray
Before *that* altar—so I think; and there
They found her beating the hard Protestant doors.
She died and she was buried ere we knew.

I learnt it first. I had to speak. At once
The bright quick smile of Evelyn, that had sunn'd
The morning of our marriage, past away :
And on our home-return the daily want

Of Edith in the house, the garden, still
Haunted us like her ghost ; and by and by,
Either from that necessity for talk
Which lives with blindness, or plain innocence
Of nature, or desire that her lost child
Should earn from both the praise of heroism,
The mother broke her promise to the dead,
And told the living daughter with what love
Edith had welcomed my brief wooing of her,
And all her sweet self-sacrifice and death.

Henceforth that mystic bond betwixt the twins—
Did I not tell you they were twins?—prevail'd
So far that no caress could win my wife
Back to that passionate answer of full heart
I had from her at first. Not that her love,
Tho' scarce as great as Edith's power of love,
Had lessen'd, but the mother's garrulous wail
For ever woke the unhappy Past again,
Till that dead bridesmaid, meant to be my bride,
Put forth cold hands between us, and I fear'd
The very fountains of her life were chill'd ;
So took her thence, and brought her here, and here
She bore a child, whom reverently we call'd
Edith ; and in the second year was born

A second—this I named from her own self,
Evelyn ; then two weeks—no more—she joined,
In and beyond the grave, that one she loved.

Now in this quiet of declining life,
Thro' dreams by night and trances of the day,
The sisters glide about me hand in hand,
Both beautiful alike, nor can I tell
One from the other, no, nor care to tell
One from the other, only know they come,
They smile upon me, till, remembering all
The love they both have borne me, and the love
I bore them both—divided as I am
From either by the stillness of the grave—
I know not which of these I love the best.

But *you* love Edith ; and her own true eyes
Are traitors to her ; our quick Evelyn—
The merrier, prettier, wittier, as they talk,
And not without good reason, my good son—
Is yet untouch'd : and I that hold them both
Dearest of all things—well, I am not sure—
But if there lie a preference eitherway,
And in the rich vocabulary of Love
'Most dearest' be a true superlative—
I think *I* likewise love your Edith most.

THE VILLAGE WIFE; OR, THE ENTAIL¹

I

'OUSE-KEEPER sent tha my lass, fur New Squire coom'd
last night.

Butter an' heggs—yis—yis. I'll goä wi' tha back : all
right ;

Butter I warrants be prime, an' I warrants the heggs
be as well,

Hafe a pint o' milk runs out when ya breäks the shell.

II

Sit thysen down fur a bit: hev a glass o' cowslip wine !
I liked the owd Squire an' 'is gells as thaw they was
gells o' mine,

Fur then we was all es one, the Squire an' 'is darters
an' me,

Hall but Miss Annie, the heldest, I niver not took to
she :

But Nelly, the last of the cletch,² I liked 'er the fust
on 'em all,

Fur hoffens we talkt o' my darter es died o' the fever
at fall :

¹ See note to ' Northern Cobbler.' ² A brood of chickens.

50 *The Village Wife ; or, The Entail*

An' I thowt 'twur the will o' the Lord, but Miss Annie
she said it wur draäins,
Fur she hedn't naw coomful in 'er, an' arn'd naw thanks
fur 'er paäins.
Eh ! thebbe all wi' the Lord my childer, I han't gotten
none !
Sa new Squire's coom'd wi' 'is taäil in 'is 'and, an' owd
Squire's gone.

III

Fur 'staäte be i' taäil, my lass : tha closn' know what
that be ?
But I knaws the law, I does, for the lawyer ha tow'd it
me.
'When theer's naw 'cäd to a 'Ouse by the fault o' that
ere maäle—
The gells they counts fur nowt, and the next un he
taäkes the taäil.'

IV

What be the next un like ? can tha tell ony harm on
'im lass ?—
Naay sit down—naw 'urry—sa cowl !—hev another
glass !

Straänge an' cowl fur the time ! we may happen a fall
o' snaw—

Not es I cares fur to hear ony harm, but I likes to know.
An' I 'oäps es 'e beänt boooklarn'd : but 'e dosn' not
coom fro' the shere ;

We'd anew o' that wi' the Squire, an' we haätes boook-
larnin' ere.

V

Fur Squire wur a Varsity scholard, an' niver lookt arter
the land—

Whoäts or tonups or taätes—'e 'ed hallus a booök i' 'is
'and,

Hallus aloän wi' 'is booöks, thaw nigh upo' seventy year.
An' booöks, what's booöks ? thou knaws thebbe naither
'ere nor theer.

VI

An' the gells, they hedn't naw taäils, an' the lawyer he
towd it me

That 'is taäil were soä tied up es he couldn't cut down
a tree !

' Drat the trees,' says I, to be sewer I haätes 'em, my lass,
Fur we puts the muck o' the land an' they sucks the
muck fro' the grass.

VII

An' Squire wur hallus a-smilin', an' gied to the tramps
goin' by—
An' all o' the wust i' the parish—wi' hoffens a drop in
'is eye.
An' ivry darter o' Squire's hed her awn ridin-erse to
'ersen,
An' they rampaged about wi' their grooms, an' was
'untin' arter the men,
An' hallus a-dallackt ¹ an' dizen'd out, an' a-buyin' new
cloäthes,
While 'e sit like a greät glimmer-gowk ² wi' 'is glasses
athurt 'is noäse,
An' 'is noäse sa grufted wi' snuff es it couldn't be
scroob'd awaäy,
Fur atween 'is reädin' an' writin' 'e sniff't up a box in
a daäy,
An' 'e niver runn'd arter the fox, nor arter the birds wi'
'is gun,
An' 'e niver not shot one 'are, but 'e leäved it to Charlie
'is son,
An' 'e niver not fish'd 'is awn ponds, but Charlie 'e
cotch'd the pike,

¹ Overdrest in gay colours.² Owl.

For 'e warn't not burn to the land, an' 'e didn't take
kind to it like ;
But I eärs es 'e'd gie fur a howry¹ owd book thutty
pound an' moor,
An' 'e'd wrote an owd book, his awn sen, sa I knaw'd
es 'e'd coom to be poor ;
An' 'e gied—I be fear'd fur to tell tha 'ow much—fur
an owd scratted stoän,
An' 'e digg'd up a loomp i' the land an' 'e got a brown
pot an' a boän,
An' 'e bowt owd money, es wouldn't goä, wi' good
gowd o' the Queen,
An' 'e bowt little statutes all-naäkt an' which was a
shaame to be seen ;
But 'e niver loökt ower a bill, nor 'e niver not seed
to owt,
An' 'e niver knawd nowt but booöks, an' booöks, as
thou knaws, beänt nowt.

VIII

But owd Squire's läädy es long es she lived she kep
'em all clear,
Thaw es long es she lived I niver hed none of 'er
darters 'ere ;

¹ Filthy.

54 *The Village Wife ; or, The Entail*

But arter she died we was all es one, the childer an' me,
An' sarvints runn'd in an' out, an' offens we hed 'em to
tea.

Lawk ! 'ow I laugh'd when the lasses 'ud talk o' their
Missis's waäys,
An' the Missis talk'd o' the lasses.—I'll tell tha some
o' these daäys.

Hoänly Miss Annie were saw stuck oop, like 'er mother
afoor—

'Er an' 'er blessed darter—they niver derken'd my
door.

IX

An' Squire 'e smiled an' 'e smiled till 'e'd gotten a
fright at last,

An' 'e calls fur 'is son, fur the 'turney's letters they
foller'd sa fast :

But Squire wur afear'd o' 'is son, an' 'e says to 'im,
meek as a mouse,

'Lad, thou mun cut off thy taäil, or the gells 'ull goä
to the 'Ouse,

Fur I finds es I be that i' debt, es I 'oäps es thou'll
'elp me a bit,

An' if thou'll 'gree to cut off thy taäil I may saäve
mysen yit.'

X

But Charlie 'e sets back 'is ears, an' 'e sweärs, an' 'e
says to 'im 'Noa.
I've gotten the 'staäte by the taäil an' be dang'd if I
iver let goa !
Coom ! coom ! feyther,' 'e says, 'why shouldn't thy
booöks be sowd ?
I hears es soom o' thy booöks mebbe worth their
weight i' gowd.'

XI

Heäps an' heäps o' booöks, I ha' see'd 'em, belong'd
to the Squire,
But the lasses 'ed teärd out leäves i' the middle to
kindle the fire ;
Sa moäst on 'is owd big booöks fetch'd nigh to nowt
at the saäle,
And Squire were at Charlie ageän to git 'im to cut off
'is taäil.

XII

Ya wouldn't find Charlie's likes—'e were that outdacious
at 'oäm,
Not thaw ya went fur to raäke out Hell wi' a small-
tooth coämb—

56 *The Village Wife ; or, The Entail*

Droonk wi' the Quoloty's wine, an' droonk wi' the
farmer's aäle,
Mad wi' the lasses an' all—an' 'e wouldn't cut off the
taäil.

XIII

Thou's coom'd oop by the beck ; and a thurn be a-
grawin' theer,
I niver ha seed it sa white wi' the Maäy es I see'd it
to-year—
Theerabouts Charlie joompt—and it gied me a scare
tother night,
Fur I thowt it wur Charlie's ghoäst i' the derk, fur it
looökt sa white.
' Billy,' says 'e, 'hev a joomp !'—thaw the banks o' the
beck be sa high,
Fur he ca'd 'is 'erse Billy-rough-un, thaw niver a hair
wur awry ;
But Billy fell bakkuds o' Charlie, an' Charlie 'e brok 'is
neck,
Sa theer wur a hend o' the taäil, fur 'e lost 'is taäil i'
the beck.

XIV

Sa 'is taäil wur lost an' 'is booöks wur gone an' 'is boy
wur deäd,

An' Squire 'e smiled an' 'e smiled, but 'e niver not lift
oop 'is 'eäd :
Hallus a soft un Squire ! an' 'e smiled, fur 'e hedn't
naw friend,
Sa feyther an' son was buried together, an' this wur the
hend.

XV

An' Parson as hesn't the call, nor the mooney, but hes
the pride,
'E reäds of a sewer an' sartan 'oäp o' the tother side ;
But I beänt that sewer es the Lord, howsiver they
praäy'd an' praäy'd,
Lets them inter 'eaven eäsy es leäves their debts to be
paäid.
Siver the mou'ds rattled down upo' poor owd Squire i'
the wood,
An' I cried along wi' the gells, fur they weänt niver
coom to naw good.

XVI

Fur Molly the long un she walkt awaäy wi' a hofficer
lad,
An' nawbody 'eärd on 'er sin, sa o' coorse she be gone
to the bad !

58 *The Village Wife ; or, The Entail*

An' Lucy wur lääme o' one leg, sweet'arts she niver 'ed none—

Straänge an' unheppen¹ Miss Lucy ! we naämed her 'Dot an' gaw one !'

An' Hetty wur weak i' the hattics, wi'out ony harm i' the legs,

An' the fever 'ed baäked Jinny's 'eäd as bald as one o' them heggs,

An' Nelly wur up fro' the craädle as big i' the mouth as a cow,

An' saw she mun hammergrate,² lass, or she weänt git a maäte onyhow !

An' es for Miss Annie es call'd me afoor my awn foäłks to my faäce

'A hignorant village wife as 'ud hev to be larn'd her awn plaäce,'

Hes fur Miss Hannie the heldest hes now be a-grawin' sa howd,

I knows that mooch o' sheä, es it beänt not fit to be towd !

XVII

Sa I didn't not taäke it kindly ov owd Miss Annie to saäy

¹ Ungainly, awkward.

² Emigrate.

Es I should be talkin ageän 'em, es soon es they went
awaäy,
Fur, lawks ! 'ow I cried when they went, an' our Nelly
she gied me 'er 'and,
Fur I'd ha done owt for the Squire an' 'is gells es
belong'd to the land ;
Booöks, es I said afoor, thebbe neyther 'ere nor
theer !
But I sarved 'em wi' butter an' heggs fur huppuds o'
twenty year.

XVIII

An' they hallus paäid what I hax'd, sa I hallus deal'd
wi' the Hall,
An' they knaw'd what butter wur, an' they knaw'd
what a hegg wur an' all ;
Hugger-mugger they lived, but they wasn't that eäsy
to pleäse,
Till I gied 'em Hinjian curn, an' they laäid big heggs
es tha sees ;
An' I niver puts saäme¹ i' *my* butter, they does it at
Willis's farm,
Taäste another drop o' the wine—tweänt do tha naw
harm.

¹ Lard.

XIX

Sa new Squire's coom'd wi' 'is taäil in 'is 'and, an' owd
Squire's gone ;
I heard 'im a roomlin' by, but arter my nightcap
wur on ;
Sa I han't clapt eyes on 'im yit, fur he coom'd last
night sa laäte—
Pluksh ! ! !¹ the hens i' the peas ! why didn't tha
hesp the gaäte ?

IN THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

EMMIE

I

OUR doctor had call'd in another, I never had seen
him before,
But he sent a chill to my heart when I saw him come
in at the door,

¹ A cry accompanied by a clapping of hands to scare trespassing fowl.

Fresh from the surgery-schools of France and of other
lands—
Harsh red hair, big voice, big chest, big merciless hands !
Wonderful cures he had done, O yes, but they said
too of him
He was happier using the knife than in trying to save
the limb,
And that I can well believe, for he look'd so coarse
and so red,
I could think he was one of those who would break
their jests on the dead,
And mangle the living dog that had loved him and
fawn'd at his knee—
Drench'd with the hellish oorali—that ever such things
should be !

II

Here was a boy—I am sure that some of our children
would die
But for the voice of Love, and the smile, and the
comforting eye—
Here was a boy in the ward, every bone seem'd out of
its place—
Caught in a mill and crush'd—it was all but a hopeless
case :

And he handled him gently enough ; but his voice and
his face were not kind,
And it was but a hopeless case, he had seen it and
made up his mind,
And he said to me roughly 'The lad will need little
more of your care.'
'All the more need,' I told him, 'to seek the Lord
Jesus in prayer ;
They are all his children here, and I pray for them all
as my own :'
But he turn'd to me, 'Ay, good woman, can prayer set
a broken bone ?'
Then he mutter'd half to himself, but I know that I
heard him say
'All very well—but the good Lord Jesus has had his
day.'

III

Had? has it come? It has only dawn'd. It will
come by and by.
O how could I serve in the wards if the hope of the
world were a lie?
How could I bear with the sights and the loathsome
smells of disease
But that He said 'Ye do it to me, when ye do it to these'?

IV

So he went. And we past to this ward where the
younger children are laid :
Here is the cot of our orphan, our darling, our meek
little maid ;
Empty you see just now ! We have lost her who loved
her so much—
Patient of pain tho' as quick as a sensitive plant to the
touch ;
Hers was the prettiest prattle, it often moved me to tears,
Hers was the gratefulest heart I have found in a child
of her years—
Nay you remember our Emmie ; you used to send her
the flowers ;
How she would smile at 'em, play with 'em, talk to 'em
hours after hours !
They that can wander at will where the works of the
Lord are reveal'd
Little guess what joy can be got from a cowslip out of
the field ;
Flowers to these 'spirits in prison' are all they can
know of the spring,
They freshen and sweeten the wards like the waft of
an Angel's wing ;

And she lay with a flower in one hand and her thin
hands crost on her breast—
Wan, but as pretty as heart can desire, and we thought
her at rest,
Quietly sleeping—so quiet, our doctor said ‘Poor little
dear,
Nurse, I must do it to-morrow ; she’ll never live thro’
it, I fear.’

V

I walk’d with our kindly old doctor as far as the head
of the stair,
Then I return’d to the ward ; the child didn’t see I was
there.

VI

Never since I was nurse, had I been so grieved and
so vext !
Emmie had heard him. Softly she call’d from her cot
to the next,
‘He says I shall never live thro’ it, O Annie, what
shall I do?’
Annie consider’d. ‘If I,’ said the wise little Annie,
‘was you,

I should cry to the dear Lord Jesus to help me, for,
Emmie, you see,
It's all in the picture there: "Little children should
come to me."

(Meaning the print that you gave us, I find that it
always can please

Our children, the dear Lord Jesus with children about
his knees.)

'Yes, and I will,' said Emmie, 'but then if I call to the
Lord,

How should he know that it's me? such a lot of beds
in the ward!'

That was a puzzle for Annie. Again she consider'd
and said:

'Emmie, you put out your arms, and you leave 'em
outside on the bed—

The Lord has so *much* to see to! but, Emmie, you tell
it him plain,

It's the little girl with her arms lying out on the
counterpane.'

VII

I had sat three nights by the child—I could not watch
her for four—

My brain had begun to reel—I felt I could do it no more.

That was my sleeping-night, but I thought that it
never would pass.
There was a thunderclap once, and a clatter of hail on
the glass,
And there was a phantom cry that I heard as I tost about,
The motherless bleat of a lamb in the storm and the
darkness without ;
My sleep was broken besides with dreams of the
dreadful knife
And fears for our delicate Emmie who scarce would
escape with her life ;
Then in the gray of the morning it seem'd she stood
by me and smiled,
And the doctor came at his hour, and we went to see
to the child.

VIII

He had brought his ghastly tools : we believed her
asleep again—
Her dear, long, lean, little arms lying out on the
counterpane ;
Say that His day is done ! Ah why should we care
what they say ?
The Lord of the children had heard her, and Emmie
had past away.

DEDICATORY POEM TO THE PRINCESS
ALICE

DEAD PRINCESS, living Power, if that, which lived
True life, live on—and if the fatal kiss,
Born of true life and love, divorce thee not
From earthly love and life—if what we call
The spirit flash not all at once from out
This shadow into Substance—then perhaps
The mellow'd murmur of the people's praise
From thine own State, and all our breadth of realm,
Where Love and Longing dress thy deeds in light,
Ascends to thee ; and this March morn that sees
Thy Soldier-brother's bridal orange-bloom
Break thro' the yews and cypress of thy grave,
And thine Imperial mother smile again,
May send one ray to thee ! and who can tell—
Thou—England's England-loving daughter—thou
Dying so English thou wouldst have her flag
Borne on thy coffin—where is he can swear
But that some broken gleam from our poor earth
May touch thee, while remembering thee, I lay
At thy pale feet this ballad of the deeds
Of England, and her banner in the East ?

THE DEFENCE OF LUCKNOW

I

BANNER of England, not for a season, O banner of
Britain, hast thou
Floated in conquering battle or flapt to the battle-cry !
Never with mightier glory than when we had rear'd thee
on high
Flying at top of the roofs in the ghastly siege of Luck-
now—
Shot thro' the staff or the halyard, but ever we raised
thee anew,
And ever upon the topmost roof our banner of England
blew.

II

Frail were the works that defended the hold that we
held with our lives—
Women and children among us, God help them, our
children and wives !
Hold it we might—and for fifteen days or for twenty at
most.
' Never surrender, I charge you, but every man die at
his post !'

Voice of the dead whom we loved, our Lawrence the
best of the brave :
Cold were his brows when we kiss'd him—we laid him
that night in his grave.
'Every man die at his post !' and there hail'd on our
houses and halls
Death from their rifle-bullets, and death from their
cannon-balls,
Death in our innermost chamber, and death at our
slight barricade,
Death while we stood with the musket, and death while
we stoop to the spade,
Death to the dying, and wounds to the wounded, for
often there fell,
Striking the hospital wall, crashing thro' it, their shot
and their shell,
Death—for their spies were among us, their marksmen
were told of our best,
So that the brute bullet broke thro' the brain that could
think for the rest ;
Bullets would sing by our foreheads, and bullets would
rain at our feet—
Fire from ten thousand at once of the rebels that girdled
us round—
Death at the glimpse of a finger from over the breadth
of a street,

Death from the heights of the mosque and the palace,
and death in the ground !
Mine? yes, a mine ! Countermine ! down, down ! and
creep thro' the hole !
Keep the revolver in hand ! you can hear him—the
murderous mole !
Quiet, ah ! quiet—wait till the point of the pickaxe be
thro' !
Click with the pick, coming nearer and nearer again
than before—
Now let it speak, and you fire, and the dark pioneer is
no more ;
And ever upon the topmost roof our banner of England
blew !

III

Ay, but the foe sprung his mine many times, and it
chanced on a day
Soon as the blast of that underground thunderclap
echo'd away,
Dark thro' the smoke and the sulphur like so many
fiends in their hell—
Cannon-shot, musket-shot, volley on volley, and yell
upon yell—
Fiercely on all the defences our myriad enemy fell.

What have they done? where is it? Out yonder.
Guard the Redan!
Storm at the Water-gate! storm at the Bailey-gate!
storm, and it ran
Surging and swaying all round us, as ocean on every
side
Plunges and heaves at a bank that is daily devour'd by
the tide—
So many thousands that if they be bold enough, who
shall escape?
Kill or be kill'd, live or die, they shall know we are
soldiers and men!
Ready! take aim at their leaders—their masses are
gapp'd with our grape—
Backward they reel like the wave, like the wave fling-
ing forward again,
Flying and foil'd at the last by the handful they could
not subdue;
And ever upon the topmost roof our banner of England
blew.

IV

Handful of men as we were, we were English in heart
and in limb,
Strong with the strength of the race to command, to
obey, to endure,

Each of us fought as if hope for the garrison hung but
on him ;

Still—could we watch at all points ? we were every day
fewer and fewer.

There was a whisper among us, but only a whisper
that past :

‘ Children and wives—if the tigers leap into the fold
unawares—

Every man die at his post—and the foe may outlive us
at last—

Better to fall by the hands that they love, than to fall
into theirs ! ’

Roar upon roar in a moment two mines by the enemy
sprung

Clove into perilous chasms our walls and our poor
palisades.

Rifleman, true is your heart, but be sure that your
hand be as true !

Sharp is the fire of assault, better aimed are your flank
fusillades—

‘ Twice do we hurl them to earth from the ladders to
which they had clung,

Twice from the ditch where they shelter we drive them
with hand-grenades ;

And ever upon the topmost roof our banner of England
blew.

v

Then on another wild morning another wild earthquake
out-tore
Clean from our lines of defence ten or twelve good
paces or more.
Rifleman, high on the roof, hidden there from the light
of the sun —
One has leapt up on the breach, crying out : ‘ Follow
me, follow me ! ’—
Mark him—he falls ! then another, and *him* too, and
down goes he.
Had they been bold enough then, who can tell but the
traitors had won ?
Boardings and rafters and doors—an embrasure ! make
way for the gun !
Now double-charge it with grape ! It is charged and
we fire, and they run.
Praise to our Indian brothers, and let the dark face
have his due !
Thanks to the kindly dark faces who fought with us,
faithful and few,
Fought with the bravest among us, and drove them,
and smote them, and slew,
That ever upon the topmost roof our banner in India
blew.

VI

Men will forget what we suffer and not what we do.
We can fight !
But to be soldier all day and be sentinel all thro' the
night—
Ever the mine and assault, our sallies, their lying
alarms,
Bugles and drums in the darkness, and shoutings and
soundings to arms, .
Ever the labour of fifty that had to be done by five,
Ever the marvel among us that one should be left
alive,
Ever the day with its traitorous death from the loop-
holes around,
Ever the night with its coffinless corpse to be laid in
the ground,
Heat like the mouth of a hell, or a deluge of cataract
skies,
Stench of old offal decaying, and infinite torment of
flies,
Thoughts of the breezes of May blowing over an Eng-
lish field,
Cholera, scurvy, and fever, the wound that *would* not
be heal'd,
Lopping away of the limb by the pitiful-pitiless knife,—

Torture and trouble in vain,—for it never could save us
a life.
Valour of delicate women who tended the hospital
bed,
Horror of women in travail among the dying and
dead,
Grief for our perishing children, and never a moment
for grief,
Toil and ineffable weariness, faltering hopes of relief,
Havelock baffled, or beaten, or butcher'd for all that
we knew—
Then day and night, day and night, coming down on
the still-shatter'd walls
Millions of musket-bullets, and thousands of cannon-
balls—
But ever upon the topmost roof our banner of England
blew.

VIII

Hark cannonade, fusillade ! is it true what was told by
the scout,
Outram and Havelock breaking their way through the
fell mutineers ?
Surely the pibroch of Europe is ringing again in our
ears !
All on a sudden the garrison utter a jubilant shout,

Havelock's glorious Highlanders answer with conquering cheers,
Sick from the hospital echo them, women and children
come out,
Blessing the wholesome white faces of Havelock's good
fusileers,
Kissing the war-harden'd hand of the Highlander wet
with their tears !
Dance to the pibroch !—saved ! we are saved !—is it
you ? is it you ?
Saved by the valour of Havelock, saved by the blessing
of Heaven !
' Hold it for fifteen days ! ' we have held it for eighty-
seven !
And ever aloft on the palace roof the old banner of
England blew.

SIR JOHN OLDCASTLE, LORD COBHAM

(IN WALES)

MY friend should meet me somewhere hereabout
To take me to that hiding in the hills.

I have broke their cage, no gilded one, I trow—
I read no more the prisoner's mute wail
Scribbled or carved upon the pitiless stone ;
I find hard rocks, hard life, hard cheer, or none,
For I am emptier than a friar's brains ;
But God is with me in this wilderness,
These wet black passes and foam-churning chasms—
And God's free air, and hope of better things.

I would I knew their speech ; not now to glean,
Not now—I hope to do it—some scatter'd ears,
Some ears for Christ in this wild field of Wales—
But, bread, merely for bread. This tongue that
wagg'd

They said with such heretical arrogance
Against the proud archbishop Arundel—
So much God's cause was fluent in it—is here
But as a Latin Bible to the crowd ;

78 *Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham*

‘Bara!’—what use? The Shepherd, when I speak,
Vailing a sudden eyelid with his hard
‘Dim Sæsneg’ passes, wroth at things of old—
No fault of mine. Had he God’s word in Welsh
He might be kindlier: happily come the day!

Not least art thou, thou little Bethlehem
In Judah, for in thee the Lord was born;
Nor thou in Britain, little Lutterworth,
Least, for in thee the word was born again.

Heaven-sweet Evangel, ever-living word,
Who whilome spakest to the South in Greek
About the soft Mediterranean shores,
And then in Latin to the Latin crowd,
As good need was—thou hast come to talk our isle.
Hereafter thou, fulfilling Pentecost,
Must learn to use the tongues of all the world.
Yet art thou thine own witness that thou bringest
Not peace, a sword, a fire.

What did he say,
My frightened Wiclif-preacher whom I crost
In flying hither? that one night a crowd
Throng’d the waste field about the city gates:
The king was on them suddenly with a host.
Why there? they came to hear their preacher. Then

Some cried on Cobham, on the good Lord Cobham ;
Ay, for they love me ! but the king—nor voice
Nor finger raised against him—took and hang'd,
Took, hang'd and burnt—how many—thirty-nine—
Call'd it rebellion—hang'd, poor friends, as rebels
And burn'd alive as heretics ! for your Priest
Labels—to take the king along with him—
All heresy, treason : but to call men traitors
May make men traitors.

Rose of Lancaster,
Red in thy birth, redder with household war,
Now reddest with the blood of holy men,
Redder to be, red rose of Lancaster—
If somewhere in the North, as Rumour sang
Fluttering the hawks of this crown-lusting line—
By firth and loch thy silver sister grow,¹
That were my rose, there my allegiance due.
Self-starved, they say—nay, murder'd, doubtless dead.
So to this king I cleaved : my friend was he,
Once my fast friend : I would have given my life
To help his own from scathe, a thousand lives
To save his soul. He might have come to learn
Our Wiclif's learning : but the worldly Priests
Who fear the king's hard common-sense should find

¹ Richard II.

What rotten piles uphold their mason-work,
Urge him to foreign war. O had he will'd
I might have stricken a lusty stroke for him,
But he would not ; far lieber led my friend
Back to the pure and universal church,
But he would not : whether that heirless flaw
In his throne's title make him feel so frail,
He leans on Antichrist ; or that his mind,
So quick, so capable in soldiership,
In matters of the faith, alas the while !
More worth than all the kingdoms of this world,
Runs in the rut, a coward to the Priest.

Burnt—good Sir Roger Acton, my dear friend !
Burnt too, my faithful preacher, Beverley !
Lord give thou power to thy two witnesses !
Lest the false faith make merry over them !
Two—nay but thirty-nine have risen and stand,
Dark with the smoke of human sacrifice,
Before thy light, and cry continually—
Cry—against whom ?

Him, who should bear the sword
Of Justice—what ! the kingly, kindly boy ;
Who took the world so easily heretofore,
My boon companion, tavern-fellow—him

Who gibed and japed—in many a merry tale
That shook our sides—at Pardoners, Summoners,
Friars, absolution-sellers, monkeries
And nunneries, when the wild hour and the wine
Had set the wits aflame.

Harry of Monmouth,
Or Amurath of the East?

Better to sink
Thy fleurs-de-lys in slime again, and fling
Thy royalty back into the riotous fits
Of wine and harlotry—thy shame, and mine,
Thy comrade—than to persecute the Lord,
And play the Saul that never will be Paul.

Burnt, burnt ! and while this mitred Arundel
Dooms our unlicensed preacher to the flame,
The mitre-sanction'd harlot draws his clerks
Into the suburb—their hard celibacy,
Sworn to be veriest ice of pureness, molten
Into adulterous living, or such crimes
As holy Paul—a shame to speak of them—
Among the heathen—

Sanctuary granted
To bandit, thief, assassin—yea to him
Who hacks his mother's throat—denied to him,

Who finds the Saviour in his mother tongue.
The Gospel, the Priest's pearl, flung down to swine—
The swine, lay-men, lay-women, who will come,
God willing, to outlearn the filthy friar.
Ah rather, Lord, than that thy Gospel, meant
To course and range thro' all the world, should be
Tether'd to these dead pillars of the Church—
Rather than so, if thou wilt have it so,
Burst vein, snap sinew, and crack heart, and life
Pass in the fire of Babylon ! but how long,
O Lord, how long !

My friend should meet me here.
Here is the copse, the fountain and—a Cross !
To thee, dead wood, I bow not head nor knees.
Rather to thee, green boscage, work of God,
Black holly, and white-flower'd wayfaring-tree !
Rather to thee, thou living water, drawn
By this good Wiclif mountain down from heaven,
And speaking clearly in thy native tongue—
No Latin—He that thirsteth, come and drink !

Eh ! how I anger'd Arundel asking me
To worship Holy Cross ! I spread mine arms,
God's work, I said, a cross of flesh and blood
And holier. That was heresy. (My good friend

By this time should be with me.) ‘Images?’
‘Bury them as God’s truer images
Are daily buried.’ ‘Heresy.—Penance?’ ‘Fast,
Hairshirt and scourge—nay, let a man repent,
Do penance in his heart, God hears him.’ ‘Heresy—
Not shriven, not saved?’ ‘What profits an ill Priest
Between me and my God? I would not spurn
Good counsel of good friends, but shrive myself
No, not to an Apostle.’ ‘Heresy.’
(My friend is long in coming.) ‘Pilgrimages?’
‘Drink, bagpipes, revelling, devil’s-dances, vice.
The poor man’s money gone to fat the friar.
Who reads of begging saints in Scripture?’—
‘Heresy’—
(Hath he been here—not found me—gone again?
Have I mislearnt our place of meeting?) ‘Bread—
Bread left after the blessing?’ how they stared,
That was their main test-question—glared at me!
‘He veil’d Himself in flesh, and now He veils
His flesh in bread, body and bread together.’
Then rose the howl of all the cassock’d wolves,
‘No bread, no bread. God’s body!’ Archbishop,
Bishop,
Priors, Canons, Friars, bellringers, Parish-clerks—
‘No bread, no bread!’—‘Authority of the Church,

84 *Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham*

Power of the keys !'—Then I, God help me, I
 So mock'd, so spurn'd, so baited two whole days—
 I lost myself and fell from evenness,
 And rail'd at all the Popes, that ever since
 Sylvester shed the venom of world-wealth
 Into the church, had only prov'n themselves
 Poisoners, murderers. Well—God pardon all—
 Me, them, and all the world—yea, that proud Priest,
 That mock-meek mouth of utter Antichrist,
 That traitor to King Richard and the truth,
 Who rose and doom'd me to the fire.

Amen !

Nay, I can burn, so that the Lord of life
 Be by me in my death.

Those three ! the fourth ..
 Was like the Son of God ! Not burnt were they.
 On *them* the smell of burning had not past.
 That was a miracle to convert the king.
 These Pharisees, this Caiaphas-Arundel
 What miracle could turn ? *He* here again,
He thwarting their traditions of Himself,
He would be found a heretic to Himself,
 And doom'd to burn alive.

So, caught, I burn.
 Burn ? heathen men have borne as much as this,

For freedom, or the sake of those they loved,
Or some less cause, some cause far less than mine ;
For every other cause is less than mine.
The moth will singe her wings, and singed return,
Her love of light quenching her fear of pain—
How now, my soul, we do not heed the fire ?
Faint-hearted ? tut !—faint-stomach'd ! faint as I am,
God willing, I will burn for Him.

Who comes ?

A thousand marks are set upon my head.
Friend ?—foe perhaps—a tussle for it then !
Nay, but my friend. Thou art so well disguised,
I knew thee not. Hast thou brought bread with
thee ?

I have not broken bread for fifty hours.
None ? I am damn'd already by the Priest
For holding there was bread where bread was none—
No bread. My friends await me yonder ? Yes.
Lead on then. *Up* the mountain ? Is it far ?
Not far. Climb first and reach me down thy hand.
I am not like to die for lack of bread,
For I must live to testify by fire.¹

¹ He was burnt on Christmas Day, 1417.

COLUMBUS

CHAINS, my good lord : in your raised brows I read
Some wonder at our chamber ornaments.
We brought this iron from our isles of gold.

Does the king know you deign to visit him
Whom once he rose from off his throne to greet
Before his people, like his brother king ?
I saw your face that morning in the crowd.

At Barcelona—tho' you were not then
So bearded. Yes. The city deck'd herself
To meet me, roar'd my name ; the king, the queen
Bad me be seated, speak, and tell them all
The story of my voyage, and while I spoke
The crowd's roar fell as at the ' Peace, be still !'
And when I ceased to speak, the king, the queen,
Sank from their thrones, and melted into tears,
And knelt, and lifted hand and heart and voice
In praise to God who led me thro' the waste.
And then the great ' Laudamus ' rose to heaven.

Chains for the Admiral of the Ocean ! chains
For him who gave a new heaven, a new earth,
As holy John had prophesied of me,
Gave glory and more empire to the kings
Of Spain than all their battles ! chains for him
Who push'd his prows into the setting sun,
And made West East, and sail'd the Dragon's mouth,
And came upon the Mountain of the World,
And saw the rivers roll from Paradise !

Chains ! we are Admirals of the Ocean, we,
We and our sons for ever. Ferdinand
Hath sign'd it and our Holy Catholic queen—
Of the Ocean—of the Indies—Admirals we—
Our title, which we never mean to yield,
Our guerdon not alone for what we did,
But our amends for all we might have done—
The vast occasion of our stronger life—
Eighteen long years of waste, seven in your Spain,
Lost, showing courts and kings a truth the babe
Will suck in with his milk hereafter—earth
A sphere.

Were *you* at Salamanca ? No.
We fronted there the learning of all Spain,

All their cosmogonies, their astronomies :
Guess-work *they* guess'd it, but the golden guess
Is morning-star to the full round of truth.
No guess-work ! I was certain of my goal ;
Some thought it heresy, but that would not hold.
King David call'd the heavens a hide, a tent
Spread over earth, and so this earth was flat :
Some cited old Lactantius : could it be
That trees grew downward, rain fell upward, men
Walk'd like the fly on ceilings ? and besides,
The great Augustine wrote that none could breathe
Within the zone of heat ; so might there be
Two Adams, two mankinds, and that was clean
Against God's word : thus was I beaten back,
And chiefly to my sorrow by the Church,
And thought to turn my face from Spain, appeal
Once more to France or England ; but our Queen
Recall'd me, for at last their Highnesses
Were half-assured this earth might be a sphere.

All glory to the all-blessed Trinity,
All glory to the mother of our Lord,
And Holy Church, from whom I never swerved
Not even by one hair's-breadth of heresy,
I have accomplish'd what I came to do.

Not yet—not all—last night a dream—I sail'd
On my first voyage, harass'd by the frights
Of my first crew, their curses and their groans.
The great flame-banner borne by Teneriffe,
The compass, like an old friend false at last
In our most need, appall'd them, and the wind
Still westward, and the weedy seas—at length
The landbird, and the branch with berries on it,
The carven staff—and last the light, the light
On Guanahani ! but I changed the name ;
San Salvador I call'd it ; and the light
Grew as I gazed, and brought out a broad sky
Of dawning over—not those alien palms,
The marvel of that fair new nature—not
That Indian isle, but our most ancient East
Moriah with Jerusalem ; and I saw
The glory of the Lord flash up, and beat
Thro' all the homely town from jasper, sapphire,
Chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius,
Chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase,
Jacynth, and amethyst—and those twelve gates,
Pearl—and I woke, and thought—death—I shall die—
I am written in the Lamb's own Book of Life
To walk within the glory of the Lord
Sunless and moonless, utter light—but no !

The Lord had sent this bright, strange dream to me
To mind me of the secret vow I made
When Spain was waging war against the Moor—
I strove myself with Spain against the Moor.
There came two voices from the Sepulchre,
Two friars crying that if Spain should oust
The Moslem from her limit, he, the fierce
Soldan of Egypt, would break down and raze
The blessed tomb of Christ ; whereon I vow'd
That, if our Princes harken'd to my prayer,
Whatever wealth I brought from that new world
Should, in this old, be consecrate to lead
A new crusade against the Saracen,
And free the Holy Sepulchre from thrall.

Gold? I had brought your Princes gold enough
If left alone ! Being but a Genovese,
I am handled worse than had I been a Moor,
And breach'd the belting wall of Cambalu,
And given the Great Khan's palaces to the Moor,
Or clutch'd the sacred crown of Prester John,
And cast it to the Moor : but *had* I brought
From Solomon's now-recover'd Ophir all
The gold that Solomon's navies carried home,
Would that have gilded *me* ? Blue blood of Spain,

Tho' quartering your own royal arms of Spain,
I have not : blue blood and black blood of Spain,
The noble and the convict of Castile,
Howl'd me from Hispaniola ; for you know
The flies at home, that ever swarm about
And cloud the highest heads, and murmur down
Truth in the distance—these outbuzz'd me so
That even our prudent king, our righteous queen—
I pray'd them being so calumniated
They would commission one of weight and worth
To judge between my slander'd self and me—
Fonseca my main enemy at their court,
They sent me out *his* tool, Bovadilla, one
As ignorant and impolitic as a beast—
Blockish irreverence, brainless greed—who sack'd
My dwelling, seized upon my papers, loosed
My captives, feed the rebels of the crown,
Sold the crown-farms for all but nothing, gave
All but free leave for all to work the mines,
Drove me and my good brothers home in chains,
And gathering ruthless gold—a single piece
Weigh'd nigh four thousand Castillanos—so
They tell me—weigh'd him down into the abysm—
The hurricane of the latitude on him fell,
The seas of our discovering over-roll

Him and his gold ; the frailer caravel,
With what was mine, came happily to the shore.
There was a glimmering of God's hand.

And God

Hath more than glimmer'd on me. O my lord,
I swear to you I heard his voice between
The thunders in the black Veragua nights,
'O soul of little faith, slow to believe !
Have I not been about thee from thy birth ?
Given thee the keys of the great Ocean-sea ?
Set thee in light till time shall be no more ?
Is it I who have deceived thee or the world ?
Endure ! thou hast done so well for men, that men
Cry out against thee : was it otherwise
With mine own Son ?'

And more than once in days

Of doubt and cloud and storm, when drowning hope
Sank all but out of sight, I heard his voice,
'Be not cast down. I lead thee by the hand,
Fear not.' And I shall hear his voice again—
I know that he has led me all my life,
I am not yet too old to work his will—
His voice again.

Columbus

Still for all that, my lord,
I lying here bedridden and alone,
Cast off, put by, scouted by court and king—
The first discoverer starves—his followers, all
Flower into fortune—our world's way—and I,
Without a roof that I can call mine own,
With scarce a coin to buy a meal withal,
And seeing what a door for scoundrel scum
I open'd to the West, thro' which the lust,
Villany, violence, avarice, of your Spain
Pour'd in on all those happy naked isles—
Their kindly native princes slain or slaved,
Their wives and children Spanish concubines,
Their innocent hospitalities quench'd in blood,
Some dead of hunger, some beneath the scourge,
Some over-labour'd, some by their own hands,—
Yea, the dear mothers, crazing Nature, kill
Their babies at the breast for hate of Spain—
Ah God, the harmless people whom we found
In Hispaniola's island-Paradise !
Who took us for the very Gods from Heaven,
And we have sent them very fiends from Hell ;
And I myself, myself not blameless, I
Could sometimes wish I had never led the way.

Only the ghost of our great Catholic Queen
Smiles on me, saying, 'Be thou comforted !
This creedless people will be brought to Christ
And own the holy governance of Rome.'

But who could dream that we, who bore the Cross
Thither, were excommunicated there,
For curbing crimes that scandalised the Cross,
By him, the Catalonian Minorite,
Rome's Vicar in our Indies? who believe
These hard memorials of our truth to Spain
Clung closer to us for a longer term
Than any friend of ours at Court? and yet
Pardon—too harsh, unjust. I am rack'd with pains.

You see that I have hung them by my bed,
And I will have them buried in my grave.

Sir, in that flight of ages which are God's
Own voice to justify the dead—perchance
Spain once the most chivalric race on earth,
Spain then the mightiest, wealthiest realm on earth,
So made by me, may seek to unbury me,
To lay me in some shrine of this old Spain,
Or in that vaster Spain I leave to Spain.

Then some one standing by my grave will say,
'Behold the bones of Christopher Colòn'—
'Ay, but the chains, what do *they* mean—the chains?'—
I sorrow for that kindly child of Spain
Who then will have to answer, 'These same chains
Bound these same bones back thro' the Atlantic sea,
Which he unchain'd for all the world to come.'

O Queen of Heaven who seest the souls in Hell
And purgatory, I suffer all as much
As they do—for the moment. Stay, my son
Is here anon : my son will speak for me
Ablier than I can in these spasms that grind
Bone against bone. You will not. One last word.

You move about the Court, I pray you tell
King Ferdinand who plays with me, that one,
Whose life has been no play with him and his
Hidalgos—shipwrecks, famines, fevers, fights,
Mutinies, treacheries—wink'd at, and condoned—
That I am loyal to him till the death,
And ready—tho' our Holy Catholic Queen,
Who fain had pledged her jewels on my first voyage,
Whose hope was mine to spread the Catholic faith,
Who wept with me when I return'd in chains,

Who sits beside the blessed Virgin now,
To whom I send my prayer by night and day—
She is gone—but you will tell the King, that I,
Rack'd as I am with gout, and wrench'd with pains
Gain'd in the service of His Highness, yet
Am ready to sail forth on one last voyage,
And readier, if the King would hear, to lead
One last crusade against the Saracen,
And save the Holy Sepulchre from thrall.

Going? I am old and slighted : you have dared
Somewhat perhaps in coming? my poor thanks !
I am but an alien and a Genovese.

THE END

